



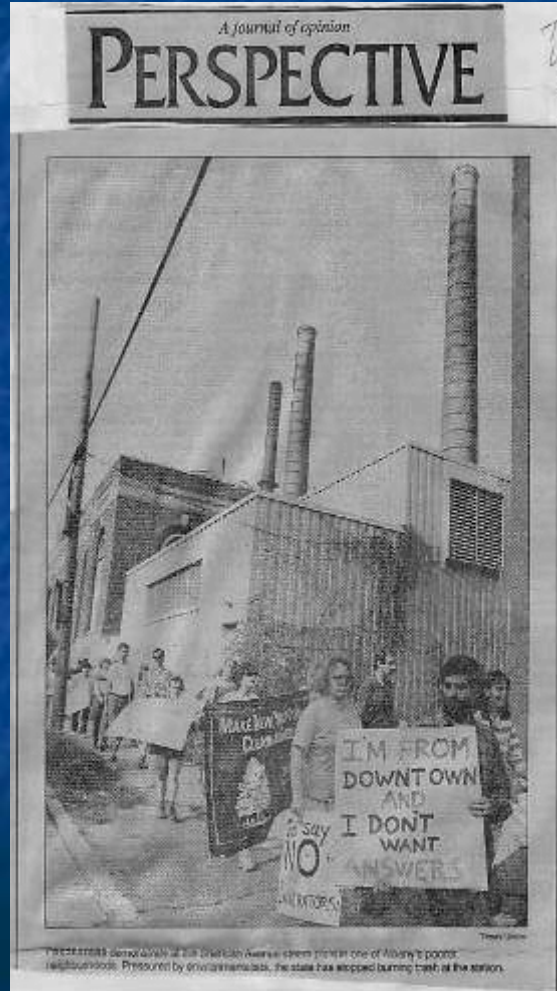
Arbor Hill Environmental Justice Corporation

Urban Watersheds and Their Effects on Environmental Justice Communities...

■ **Arbor Hill Environmental Justice Corporation (AHEJ)**

- AHEJ is a not for profit corporation under state and federal law, specifically, Section 501 c (3). AHEJ is based in the predominately African-American community of Arbor Hill within Albany, New York. The mission of AHEJ is to serve the community as environmental health advocate, conduct environmental testing, rehabilitate green and open space, and serve as a resource for legal redress. AHEJ is comprised of community members representing the Arbor Hill neighborhood associations. AHEJ is a member of the White House Council on Environmental Quality as per Executive Order 12898 stressing concern for Environmental Justice issues.
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•Environmental Advocacy



•Environmental Education



Community Monitoring



•Environmental Health Monitoring



Newsfront

Shit Creek

Arbor Hill activists say Albany has waited too long to warn people of *E. coli* contamination in Patroon Creek

THE ROCKS IN THE CREEK AT THE Tivoli Park Nature Preserve are smooth and slippery, and a tiny waterfall cascades down over them into a little pool down below.

It's not what most of us would think of as the ideal place to while away a humid summer afternoon, but for some inner-city kids who don't have access to a swimming pool or public beach, this is a refreshing place to cool off on a sweltering day.

The smooth rocks act as natural water slides, and kids slip and slide across them into the two or three feet of muddy water that is known to most as Patroon Creek, a stream that flows through industrial parks and along railroad tracks in Colonie, then through Tivoli Park, a nature preserve in a lower-income neighborhood in Albany.

Until this summer, swimming in the Patroon Creek at Tivoli, though not encouraged by the city, was considered a harmless pastime that helped inner-city kids beat the heat during the dog days of July and August. But water samples of the Patroon Creek tested by the city's Department of Water and Water Supply, conducted at the request of the Mayor's Task Force on Environmental Pollution, indicate otherwise.

Samples taken from Patroon Creek during the summer indicated that *Escherichia coli*, the fecal coliform bacteria that is suspected to have sickened more than 1,000 New Yorkers this year and to have killed two individuals who came in contact with it at the Washington County fair this summer, has made its way into the Patroon.

According to Willard Bruce, commissioner of the Department of General Services, *E. coli* is not exactly a new phenomenon in the Patroon. It first appeared in the summer of 1998, he said, but the Albany County Department of Health quickly discovered its source and eliminated it.

"But more recently," Bruce said, "there have been higher readings. And because much of the creek runs underground, the source has been harder to pinpoint."

According to city engineer William Simcoe, "small numbers of *E. coli* are fairly typical" for natural bodies of water, but once those levels are elevated beyond several hundred colonies per 100 milliliters, water becomes unsafe for consumption or recreation. Water samples taken during August indicated that *E. coli* in the Patroon Creek at Tivoli fluctuated between 2,200 and 3,900 colonies per 100 milliliters of water.

Though Tivoli's readings indicate that the coliform bacteria is many times higher than the safe amount, neighborhood activists say kids have been swimming in the waters all summer—and while the city and the Albany County Health Department have been working diligently to discover the source of the contamination, they say, no one has acknowledged that children who continue to play in or near Patroon Creek may be in danger of *E. coli* poisoning, the symptoms of which range from vomiting

and diarrhea to kidney failure and death.

"Nobody's gotten sick yet, as far as we know, knock on whatever," observed Pete Sheehan, executive director of the W. Haywood Burns Environmental Education Center in Arbor Hill. "Thankfully the swimming season is over."

While he was quick to praise city engineers for their efforts to find out where the *E. coli* is coming from, Sheehan said the city has failed to do enough to protect and educate the community about the potential dangers of coming

Creek is technically not a designated swimming area, so kids shouldn't be playing in it in the first place. Of course, that's not to say that kids don't do it anyway.

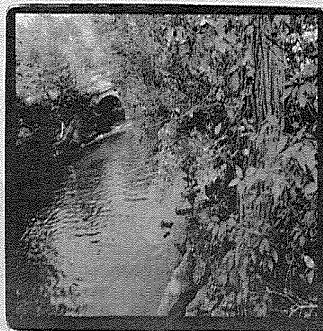
"When you say 'swimming,' Bruce said, 'it's not like you can actually swim in it. It's like, two feet deep, and you can't really swim. But do kids take their sneakers off and jump in and look for crayfish? Yeah, they probably do. The kids aren't doing anything wrong; they're just going into it for fun.'"

When *E. coli* began to turn up in the creek, he said, the city was concerned with the potential impact to human health and brought the issue up with the Albany County Health Department. Since the waters of the Patroon are technically off limits for recreational purposes and neither the city or county wanted to promote playing in or around the creek at any time, he said, the county didn't think the signs were necessary. From the city's point of view, he concluded, it would ultimately be a "county initiative" if signs were to be put up in the future.

The county Health Department referred calls to the County Executive Michael Breslin's office. Monica Mahafey, spokeswoman for the county executive, said the county was "really not any more involved other than encouraging the city to find the source of contamination" and helping the city evaluate its findings.

"Under no circumstance should anyone be swimming in there, water quality aside," she said after checking with Health Department officials. "That creek goes underground part of the time and then pops up. It's really too dangerous for anyone to be swimming in."

—Erin Sullivan



Dirty water: Tivoli Creek.

in contact with the bacteria in the water. In light of the recent *E. coli*-related illnesses and deaths in Washington County and beyond, he said it's long overdue in addressing what could become a serious threat to public health if ignored. Sheehan and Aaron Mair, founder of the environmental center, have been advocating for the city to at least put up signs warning kids that it's not safe to play in the water.

"We're not trying to cause a public scare here," Sheehan said. "But if this was a public swimming place, they would close the beach."

But according to the city, the Patroon

ALBANY, NEW YORK

FRED LEBRUN

A nasty find in just the wrong place

So what's a little depleted uranium among friends?

At the least, finding high levels of radioactive depleted uranium in the sediment of Albany's Three Mile Reservoir, which is at the head of Patroon Creek and empties into the Hudson, is a nasty surprise. And a vivid reminder that, in terms of public health and safety, we have as much to fear from our own industrial waste as we do from some terrorist event.

Government's response time and initial level of concern also is instructive. No orange alert here.

John Amason, a University at Albany assistant professor of earth and atmospheric sciences, discovered the presence of uranium in a core sample of the sediment taken in 2001 at the reservoir, which is not used for drinking water.

It took until last week for the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to confirm that this was indeed depleted uranium. That is, man-made nuclear waste, although well-buried and therefore naturally buffered and a minimal health threat. For now.

But the point is, nuclear waste was found where it wasn't supposed to be.

"At first the Corps tried to tell us it was just background uranium that occurs naturally," says Aaron Mair, whose W. Haywood Burns Environmental Education Center commissioned Amason to do the coring. Amason was looking for mercury when he found uranium. He also found mercury and cadmium. Mair's primary concern was finding the sources of the contaminants that make their way down Patroon Creek and through one of Albany's minority neighborhoods.

For centuries, Little Patroon Creek has been a common sewer for noxious wastes ranging from spilled diesel oil of the West Albany yards to rivers of pigs' blood from the former Tobin plant—and a ton of manufacturing chemistry.

A decade ago, the feds labeled Patroon Creek one of the most polluted streams in the country. Much progress cleaning it up has been made since, and the state Department of Environmental Conservation has done a great job in bringing it back. But Mair doesn't believe anyone's gone through with a Geiger counter. Who'd a thought?

Not that it's so far-fetched, finding depleted uranium at Three Mile Reservoir, or even downstream in the creek. The former NL Industries site is less than a mile upstream. When the feds shut down NL 20 years ago, they found drums of buried radioactive waste in groundwater.

NL made armor-piercing munitions with depleted uranium. The facility was taken over and eventually demolished by the Department of Energy, with cleanup of the contaminated site by the Corps of Engineers. Since 1997, the Corps has removed 70,000 tons of topsoil. It appears that will only be a beginning.

First the Corps will confirm with tests that Amason's cored uranium is from the NL. Then testing is likely to go on extensively up and down the Patroon Creek-Three Mile Reservoir corridor before a removal plan is proposed. Although Amason himself feels that most, if not all, of the radioactive sediment, as well as great amounts of heavy metals, are held back by the reservoir's 19th-century dam. Getting that sediment out will be an engineering headache of the first order.

How dangerous is this stuff? No official is pushing any alarm buttons, although Mair says the area in question has shown a spike in cancers over the years. That's unconfirmed. Certainly radioactivity, even low-level, is serious stuff. Science is continually downgrading the amount of radioactivity it takes to do harm to some people, sometimes. One bright note is that anything flowing from the old NL Industries site is a federal cleanup responsibility. If there was a state responsibility, we'd be stuck.

There isn't a loose dime in the state Superfund account.

► Contact Fred LeBrun at 454-5453.

2/21/03 T. U.

Waiting for Action

Arbor Hill residents worry that neighborhood revitalization plans are stalling again

WHEN THREE-FOURTHS OF THE Arbor Hill Neighborhood Advisory Committee failed to show up for a committee meeting last week, residents expressed concern that the mayor's plan to renew their neighborhood may be stalling.

"There is a reason why the community members outnumbered the committee members at that meeting," said Aaron Mair of Arbor Hill Concerned Citizens. "We know the best community development plans are those shaped by the people who the development is supposed to benefit and, more importantly, have to live with the outcome."

Presiding before about a dozen Arbor Hill residents, only six of 24 committee members attended the Jan. 22 meeting of the advisory committee, a neighborhood revitalization task force commissioned by Mayor Jerry Jennings and run by the developing firm the Community Builders, Inc.

Sue McCann, a vice president of Community Builders, agreed that committee attendance was poor and said it was "the lowest turnout of the committee's seven or eight meetings."

Particularly notable absences were Arbor Hill's representatives from the Albany Common Council, Michael Brown and Sarah Curry-Cobb. Neither returned phone calls for this story.

For years, residents of Arbor Hill, one of Albany's poorest districts, have cried for neighborhood improvements: more options for low-cost housing, increased youth services and beautification projects, just to name a few.

But members of the community say that working with the city on turning their neighborhood around has been frustrating. Typically, they say, city officials ignore residents' ideas for improvements to Arbor Hill, instead trying to force their own revitalization ideas on the neighborhood.

The city has twice before hired private

development firms—Norstar Development USA in 2000 and Dennison Associates in 2001—to evaluate the community's needs and proceed with improvements, but each group's assessments were successively abandoned. The city has since formed the neighborhood advisory committee and hired Community Builders, Inc. to take up the task of revitalizing Arbor Hill. But neighborhood residents feeling alienated from the process wonder if the city's plan for Arbor Hill will live up to the firm's namesake.

Draft improvements released at last week's meeting included plans for the development of commercial space at the corners of North Swan Street and Clinton Avenue, and a cultural center near North Swan Street and Ten Broeck Place. Neighborhood resident Rodney Davis said the most controversial of all the proposals was the idea of constructing 80 low-income housing units on North Swan Street.

"Most residents were not opposed to new housing plans," Davis said. "What they wanted to see was more opportunities for home ownership, not housing rental units."

The draft plan calls for the construction of 60 one- or two-unit rental homes, costing \$185,900 and \$371,800 respectively, and 20 owner-oriented residences at \$123,000 apiece. Neighborhood residents said the approximately \$14 million earmarked for the new housing could be better spent.

"Why not invest this money in buying up abandoned or foreclosed property?" asked Mair. "At these prices, you could rehabilitate every single multifamily structure in Arbor Hill. The city has a chance [to create] 100-percent owner occupancy and independence in a community or an 80-percent rental [occupancy] and create a poverty ghetto."

But McCann said that creating 100-

percent owner-occupancy housing in Arbor Hill would be taking things too far, too fast.

"There is currently only one homeowner on Swan Street," McCann said. "Accomplishing that increase would involve selling far more homes in Arbor Hill than has been possible in the past, and we believe promising any higher number than [20] would be disingenuous because it probably wouldn't be feasible."

Mair questioned how easy it would be to sell new homes that cost \$125,000 to build, considering the state of Arbor Hill's real estate market. According to James Ader, executive vice president of the Greater Capital Association of Realtors, of the 35 homes sold last year in Arbor Hill, the median sale price was \$70,000. McCann said that the cost of these homes would need to be "written down significantly," and that the neighborhood advisory committee would explore financing and construction options to keep costs low.

McCann said discussions about the future of Arbor Hill at this time are very preliminary, and she encourages community members to influence the process. Mair and Davis, who agreed that input from Arbor Hill residents could be better, contended that many community members can't attend the meetings because they take place at 8 AM, when many of them are rushing off to work or getting kids ready for school. In light of the last meeting's poor turnout by committee members, Davis questioned the practicality of holding the meetings at such an awkward time. And he questioned the city's commitment to improving Arbor Hill in general.

"Any plan that the city does is very nice, but what hard dollars have been committed to this project?" Davis asked. "Do they have any money that will commit them or is this just another merry-go-round, a report that will be filed on the shelf? Who can say for sure, but if I were a betting man, I'd say that [neighborhood revitalization] won't be done again. The city has shown nothing in its past to say otherwise."

The neighborhood advisory committee meets next on Feb. 5 at 8 AM at 200 Henry Johnson Boulevard.

—Travis Durfee

Member leads Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Protecting natural heritage his passion

By DEBORAH A. MILES

Strolling around the tiny Island Creek Park tucked away in Albany's south end, PEF member Aaron Mair noticed a heap of broken corrugated boxes nestled in the banks of the Hudson River.

"I'll have to make a call and have that removed," he said with a sigh. "There's no reason waste like that should be dumped, especially when there is a compactor a few yards away."

He shook his head. "Look over there," he said, pointing to a row of dilapidated, low-income housing units and a zigzag of concrete roadways. "Children have to cross four arterials and railroad tracks just to get to this piece of land."

Mair's passion for a better environment recently won him the election for chairman of the 40,000-member Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter.

He is the first Capital Region resident and first African-American to head the chapter. He beat out Jim Lane.

a New York City attorney for the chairmanship. Clean-up of the Hudson River is a key priority.

It's personal

By day, this PEF member and environmental zealot works as a program research specialist 2 for the state Health Department's Office of Medicaid Management in Albany.

"My love for the environment is not my vocation, but my avocation," he said. "I'm a true grass-roots volunteer who puts about 60 hours a week into environmental advocacy."

"When I walk the walk, I'm not paid to walk it," Mair said. "It is walking from the heart, and from the spirit of being a true John Muir environmentalist."

Fighting industrial pollution

When Mair was vice chair of the Sierra Club Atlantic chapter, he led the campaign against General Electric's PCB pollution of the Hudson River.

"When a corporation pollutes our natural resources and puts our health in danger, we must come together and protect those resources," Mair said.

GE's campaign against dredging the Hudson River, according to Mair, assumed people living near the river had only a recreational dependency on it. GE, he said, treated the river as if it were only a sewer or storm-run-off system for municipalities.

"What a profoundly disappointing and myopic kind of view," he said.

River more than water

Now, the core of Mair's campaign to restore the Hudson River emphasizes its importance as part of New York's natural heritage and a natural resource.

"As a resource, the river provides an abundant amount of nutritional food. And you don't have to get a food-stamp voucher to go fishing," he said.

Mair also noted religious groups have used the river for baptisms and anointments.

"The Sierra campaign is to

educate people on how functionally and culturally dependent we are on the Hudson River," Mair said.

"The river inspires our heritage and history," he added.

"The Hudson River School of art continues to inspire artists. The valley has long stretches of land where many municipalities enjoy its vistas. This is a very powerful river that symbolically cuts to the core of our nation."

Don't live with it, fix it

Mair said he will also focus attention on water quality in urban and suburban areas, and "PM 2.5" — airborne particulate matter small enough to get trapped in your lungs and cause respiratory illness and disease.

"The issue of PM 2.5 is raised by a major piece of federal legislation that will be hotly debated this year," Mair said.

This legislation would lower standards on polluting entities that emit small particulates.

The priority, he said, should be on preventing and reversing environmental health threats, rather than looking for ways to live with them.

"We don't want to just talk about producing medications that allow people to live in a dirtier environment," he said. "We need to deal with manufacturing and combustion processes that contribute to degrading the environment and human health."

Environment affects all

Mair is also founder of the Arbor Hill Environmental Justice Corp., which works to give all people a voice in the community, regardless of their race or ethnic background.

"The organization aims to build awareness in inner-city communities, especially those that are economically challenged," Mair said.

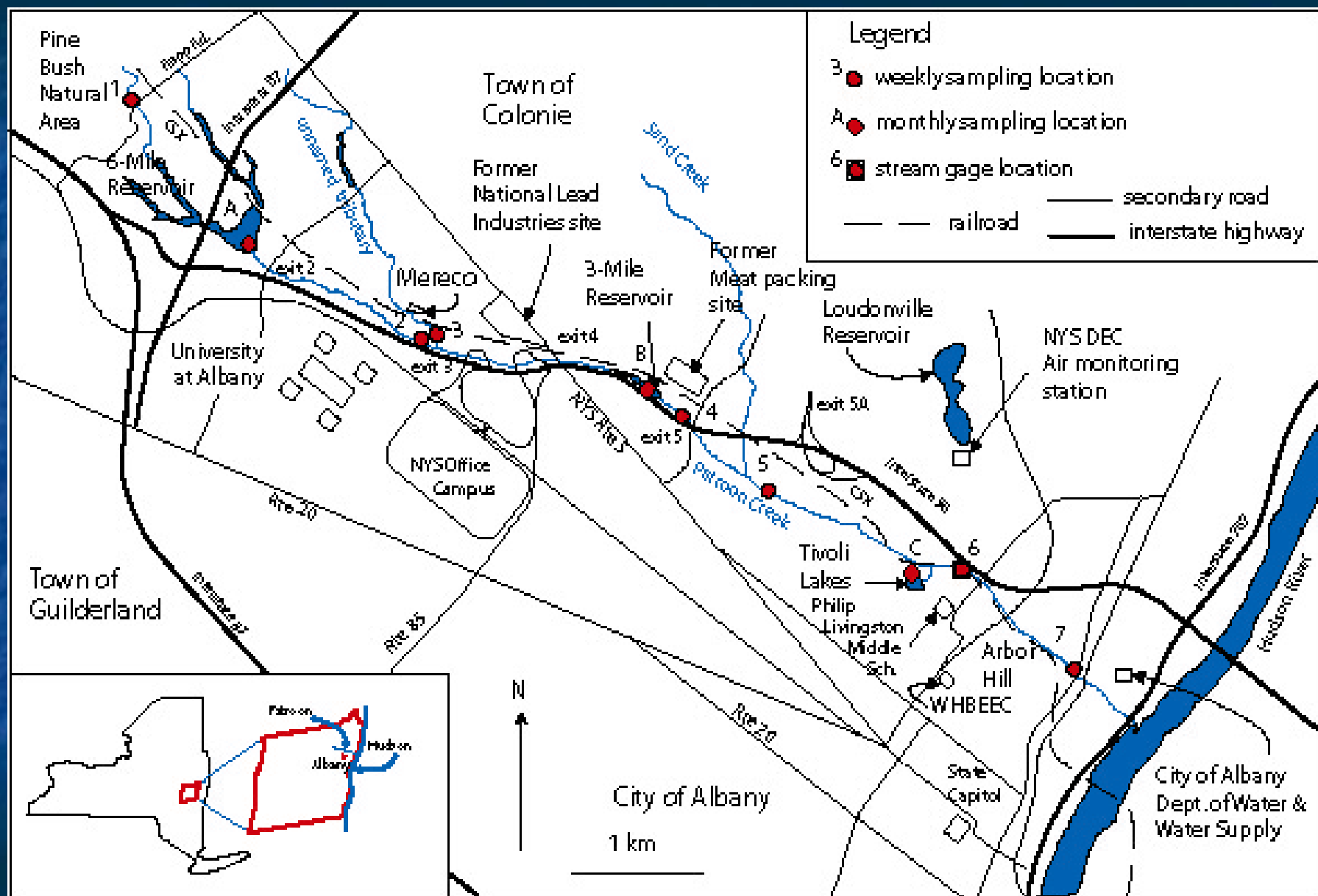
"These people are underserved when it comes to environmental amenities. And that can have a profound impact on children and on breaking the cycle of poverty."

"A clean-up anywhere, is a clean-up everywhere," he said.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATE — Aaron Mair, now chairman of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, possesses the determination and passion to alert people to the importance of the Hudson River.

— Photo by Deborah A. Miles







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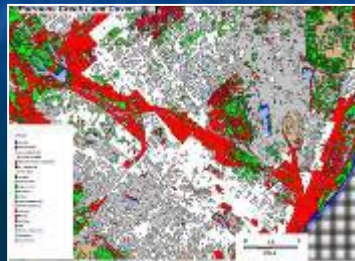
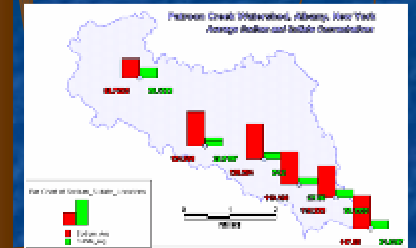


THE PATROON TRUSS MONITORING, MANAGEMENT, AND
RESTORATION PROGRAM: WATER QUALITY MONITORING BY
VOLUNTEERS

Close a water supply for the City of Albany, [Albany, New York](#) is today one of the most water-rich locations in New York State as a result of years of sewage discharge, water runoff, and climate pollution. Portions of the wastewater flow have been designated Areas of Concern by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Two important sites are located within the watershed: the National Lead Industries (NLI) site and the Albany Pipeline for [Albany](#) site, both currently under remediation by Honeywell.

The goals of the water quality monitoring are to:

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- An aerial photograph of a river network, likely the Amazon basin, showing a complex web of channels and floodplains. A series of overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular overlays are placed along the main river channel, illustrating a step-wise or segmented approach to analysis or modeling. The overlays are arranged in a descending staircase pattern from the top left towards the bottom right.



Corrosion site	Chloride (ppm)
1	~100
2	~175
3	~215
4	~195
5	~185
6	~180
7	~185

Sampling site	Distance (cm)
1	8.5
2	6.2
3	8.0
4	8.1
5	7.9
6	9.0
7	8.8

East of Angkor (Angkor Wat) and Disrupted Region

Legend:

- Average 2000-2010
- Average Disrupted Region

Scale: 0 1 2 km